

EXPLANATORY COMMENTS CONCERNING THE REVIEW
OF VOLUME 3 OF THE CBCAT WRITTEN BY DR. CURT WITTLIN
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We are grateful to our friend Curt Wittlin for his review of our volume and his generally positive assessment thereof. Nevertheless, we feel bound to reject the single criticism (and, to the best of our knowledge, up until now the only criticism this volume has received) he mentions in its regard, namely that within its pages errors of translation have been corrected. Dr. Wittlin bases his criticism upon the adjustment which has been made to Exod 10:17. The text of the Vulgate and the unrevised texts of the three Catalan manuscripts (i.e. Peiresc, Egerton and Colbert) with respect to the passage in question, read as follows:

- Vg: «non concupisces domum proximi tui»
P: «No cobejaras la cosa de ton proïisma»
E: «No cobejaràs la cose de ton proysme»
C: «No cobejaràs la cosa de ton proïsm»

The editors have emended the word *cosa* (“belongings”) and replaced it with *casa* (“house”), in keeping with the usage in the original Vulgate of *domum* (“house” or “home”), though noting in their critical apparatus the form in which it appears in each of the manuscripts: *cosa/cose/cosa*). Dr. Wittlin makes the following comments:

Editorial interventions are of two kinds: corrections of obvious errors made by the copyist (e.g.: ms C *apres* changed to *ab pedres*, because ms P reads *ab pedres*, E *de pedres*, and Latin *lapidibus*); or corrections of mistakes made by the translator (e.g. Latin “*non concupisces domum proximi tui*,” ms PC “*no cobejaràs la cosa de ton proïsm*,” changed to “...la casa...”). It seems to this reviewer that, when all Catalan manuscripts are in agreement, this kind of change is going too far. No one who wants to know what the Bible says will consult a medieval translation. Editions of translations should show philologists how old texts have been understood in those times. *Cosa* in the above example is not nonsensical as was *apres* in place of *ab pedres*, and it is well conceivable that in medieval Catalan the tenth commandment was considered to prohibit “desiring one’s neighbor’s belongings,” not just “his house.” To encourage scholars to be on the lookout for other uses of *cosa* instead of *casa* in this context, it seems recommendable to me to print in the text *cosa* and point out in a footmote that this is not what the Latin Bible says.

We concur with Wittlin that mistakes committed by the translator stand in no need of rectification; however, we do not feel that any of the corrections carried out in the text of volume 3 of the CBCat can be considered to fall into this class and, in any case, we shall now subject to analysis the emendation this reviewer cites as an example. However, first of all, it is necessary to lend added definition to what in our view is an imprecise way of understanding what constitutes the object of interest to philologists. These latter, of course, are fully entitled to show an interest in the way that historical texts were understood in their day; however, there are two kinds of possible understanding of the text, namely that of the translator who has in front of him the text being translated, and that of the copyist, who is only dealing with a version of this, in Catalan. Both phenomena can be the legitimate subject of the philologist’s inquiry, though a critical edition is bound to rectify the presumptive errors made by the copyist (and even then, the interested philologist will have access to the faulty text via the critical apparatus, should the correction have been made within the text). That

a faulty text is still meaningful, by no means implies that the underlying error could not have been the work of the copyist (see the clear example given in 1 Kings 8,16 E on this very web site, on the “Frequently asked questions” (FAQs) page, Question no. 6). Copyists tend to make a text intelligible, by modifying whatever is necessary in order to impose meaning upon a text, should this be lacking once a mistake has been introduced. The criterion for judging whether the mistake has its origins in the translator or the copyist, does not rest therefore on whether the resulting text is meaningful or not, but rather upon one’s comparison of the faulty text against the translated original, as also against other possible manuscript copies of the text, whether preserved or not. In the particular case with which we are concerned, it would seem highly unlikely that a 14th-century Bible translator – and, indeed, almost inconceivable given the way such translators customarily rendered Latin with the greatest precision and fidelity – should have translated the Latin noun *domum* (“house” or “home”), a term belonging to the most elementary of Latin vocabulary, as *cosa* (“belongings”); on the other hand, it would seem to be the most natural thing in the world that a Catalan copyist – who as a group were immensely careless in their work – might have confused an *a* with an *o* and written *cosa* instead of *casa*, all the more so and in particular given that the resultant text is still meaningful. The appearance of the copyist’s error in all three manuscripts simply indicates that it occurred at the earliest stage of the text’s transmission. All things considered, then, the likelihood of the mistake’s having been introduced by a copyist rather than the text’s translator, seems very high (there clearly being more than a 50% chance thereof) and, for this reason, we were left with no other choice but to emend the text and to indicate in the footnotes the form in which it appears within the manuscripts that have been preserved (so that via such footnotes any interested reader might have access – for scholarly purposes, if not also for that of casting doubt upon the alteration introduced by us – to the text in its unrevised form).